

# Mass Effect 3

***Mass Effect 3*** is an action role-playing third person shooter video game developed by BioWare and published by Electronic Arts for Microsoft Windows, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and Wii U.<sup>[1]</sup> Officially announced on December 11, 2010,<sup>[2]</sup><sup>[3]</sup> the game was released March 6, 2012<sup>[4]</sup><sup>[5]</sup> and marks the final chapter in the original *Mass Effect* trilogy of video games, completing the story of Commander Shepard.<sup>[6]</sup><sup>[7]</sup> A Wii U version was announced during Nintendo's conference at E3 2012.<sup>[8]</sup> The Wii U port was developed by Australian developer Straight Right,<sup>[9]</sup> and was released as a Wii U launch game<sup>[10]</sup> under the title ***Mass Effect 3: Special Edition***.

The combat system in *Mass Effect 3* was changed and refined from previous titles. In particular, the cover system was improved, additional options for traversing the battlefield and scoring instant melee kills were added, more conventional grenades are available, and improved artificial intelligence was introduced. A four player multiplayer co-op mode is also available.<sup>[11]</sup> Some of the cut scenes for *Mass Effect 3* are influenced by decisions made in *Mass Effect* and *Mass Effect 2*, for players who have completed those games, with minimal to no effect on the gameplay.

Like its predecessors, *Mass Effect 3* was released to commercial success and critical acclaim. However, the game's endings were criticized by many players and critics, prompting the release of a free extended cut DLC (downloadable content) which elaborated on the consequences of the ending chosen and the choices made by the player throughout the series, as well as clearing up elements of the story. It was nominated for five awards at the 2012 Spike Video Game Awards and it won Best RPG of 2012.<sup>[12]</sup> A new installment in the series, *Mass Effect: Andromeda*, was released on March 21, 2017.

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*Mass Effect 3*



<b>Developer(s)</b>	BioWare
<b>Publisher(s)</b>	Electronic Arts
<b>Director(s)</b>	Casey Hudson
<b>Producer(s)</b>	Jesse Houston
<b>Designer(s)</b>	Preston Watamaniuk
<b>Programmer(s)</b>	David Falkner
<b>Artist(s)</b>	Derek Watts
<b>Writer(s)</b>	Mac Walters
<b>Composer(s)</b>	Sascha Dikiciyan Sam Hulick Chris Lennertz Clint Mansell Cris Velasco
<b>Series</b>	<i>Mass Effect</i>
<b>Engine</b>	Unreal Engine 3
<b>Platform(s)</b>	Microsoft Windows PlayStation 3 Xbox 360 Wii U
<b>Release</b>	March 6, 2012
<b>Genre(s)</b>	Action role-playing, third-person shooter
<b>Mode(s)</b>	Single-player,

Pre-release

multiplayer

**Audio****Marketing****Release and downloadable content****Reception**

Critical response

Controversy

Sales

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## Gameplay

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### Character creation

*Mass Effect 3* is an action role-playing game in which the player takes control of Commander Shepard from a third-person perspective.<sup>[13]</sup> Shepard's gender, appearance, military background, combat training, and first name are determined by the player before the game begins.<sup>[14]</sup> If the player has a completed saved game from *Mass Effect 2*, the character from that game can be imported.<sup>[15]</sup> By importing an old character, decisions from prior *Mass Effect* titles are carried over, which impacts plot events in *Mass Effect 3*.<sup>[16]</sup> If no saved games are available, the player can use an interactive comic to quickly customize these decisions on the spot.<sup>[17]</sup> Upon beating the game, a New Game+ is unlocked, which allows the player to restart the game with certain bonuses, such as the ability to further upgrade weapons.<sup>[14]</sup>

Similar to previous installments in the *Mass Effect* series, the player is able to choose from six different character classes that each have their own unique set of skills.<sup>[19]</sup> For example, the Adept class is proficient in biotic (mental powers such as telekinesis, domination, and creating force fields) powers whereas the Soldier class is proficient in weapons.<sup>[20]</sup> By completing assignments and quests, the player is rewarded with experience points.<sup>[14]</sup> Once enough points have been earned, Commander Shepard levels up, which allows for the unlocking or upgrading of skills along a tree.<sup>[18]</sup>

### Quests and role-playing

There are three pre-set campaign modes in *Mass Effect 3*: Action, Story, and RPG.<sup>[21]</sup> In Action Mode, conversations have automatic replies and normal combat difficulty; in Story Mode, conversations have manual replies and minimal combat difficulty; and in RPG mode, conversations have manual replies and normal combat difficulty.<sup>[22]</sup> Overall, role-playing elements in *Mass Effect 3* are more intricate than those in *Mass Effect 2*.<sup>[23]</sup> For example, the game offers more flexibility around weapon customization.<sup>[24]</sup> Players can equip guns with different ammo types, barrels, modifications, and scopes to improve their effectiveness in combat.<sup>[25]</sup> If the player has Kinect, customization choices can be made verbally instead of selected using a controller.<sup>[26]</sup>



In *Mass Effect 3*, the first three levels of a skill are singular whereas the final three levels require the player to select from one of two options.<sup>[18]</sup>

The player's primary mode of transportation in *Mass Effect 3* is a star ship called *Normandy SR2*.<sup>[27]</sup> From the inside of the ship, the player can use a galaxy map to choose a destination point, scan planets for resources, or start missions.<sup>[28]</sup> To aid the player in managing tasks, the game automatically logs available missions in a journal; however, unlike previous titles in the series, the journal does not distinguish between main quests or side quests.<sup>[29]</sup> In general, the game revolves around increasing "Effective Military Strength" (EMS) to prepare for its final mission, a confrontation with the Reapers.<sup>[30]</sup> EMS is calculated by multiplying "Total Military Strength" (TMS) and "Readiness Rating" (RR).<sup>[31]</sup> TMS is increased by acquiring "War Assets", which include accomplishments from all three *Mass Effect* games, whereas RR is increased by playing *Mass Effect 3*'s multiplayer mode.<sup>[30]</sup>

## Dialog and morality

Unless the game is set to Action Mode, the player interacts with non-player characters in *Mass Effect 3* by using a radial command menu where dialog options depend on wheel direction.<sup>[32]</sup> Most conversations are advanced by choosing either a Paragon (diplomatic) or Renegade (intimidating) option, which appear to the top and bottom right of the wheel, respectively.<sup>[14]</sup> By conversing with squadmates aboard the *Normandy*, Commander Shepard can develop friendships or, in some cases, romantic relationships with them over time.<sup>[33]</sup> Same-sex relationships for both female and male Commander Shepards are available.<sup>[34]</sup> If Commander Shepard was imported from *Mass Effect 2* and achieved a love interest in each of the prior *Mass Effect* games, then both characters vie for Shepard's attention in *Mass Effect 3*.<sup>[35]</sup> During some conversations, the player is prompted with a context-sensitive interrupt option that offers a temporary alternative to what is available on the dialog wheel.<sup>[14]</sup>

On several occasions, the player must make large-scale decisions that significantly impact the game's narrative.<sup>[36]</sup> For example, one mission asks the player to side with one of two species; whichever is ignored is eradicated.<sup>[37]</sup> Over the course *Mass Effect 3*, dialog and narrative decisions result in "Reputation Points", which are added together and unlock further decision-making and dialog options as they accumulate.<sup>[36]</sup> At the conclusion of the game, the player is given a series of choices regarding how to best defeat the Reapers; the number of choices, the state of the Earth, the state of the *Normandy*, and the fate of Commander Shepard depends on accomplishments earned and decisions made throughout the series.<sup>[38]</sup>

## Combat

Combat in *Mass Effect 3* is changed and refined from *Mass Effect 2*, with further emphasis put on third-person perspective aspects to make the game more commercially viable.<sup>[39]</sup> In a preview of the game for IGN, editor Arthur Gies went so far as to say the game "plays like a shooter" and that "combat-wise, *Mass Effect 3* is in an entirely different space [from the first two games]". In an article for bitgamer, Joe Martin gave a conflicting impression, noting that with regard to combat, "not a lot has changed".<sup>[40]</sup>

The series' cover system has been improved so players no longer need to slide into cover and then hop over objects. Players have more options for moving around the battlefield than ever before, including a refined sprint capability, combat rolling, and the use of climbable ladders.<sup>[41]</sup> Players can also blindfire their weapons from covered positions, and have opportunities to shoot selected armor pieces and limbs off enemies. For Kinect users, verbal orders can be issued to move squad mates and use their powers.<sup>[26]</sup> Moving and shooting, a "suicidal maneuver" in *Mass Effect 2*, is now a viable option because of a revised melee system.<sup>[42]</sup> Players are able to execute formidable punches and attacks, and instant melee kills are introduced specific to each class; for example, by holding down the melee button, a soldier Shepard will deliver a killing blow with an omni-blade. Conventional grenades are also available.

*Mass Effect 3* was planned as the most difficult in the series, with increased artificial intelligence to challenge players and increase the sense of reward.<sup>[43]</sup> Enemies no longer act as individuals as they did in the previous games, instead fighting and supporting each other in units. Enemies include 15-foot (4.6 m) tall Cerberus mechs, assault troopers, and

ninja-style shock troops, as well as Reaperized husks of most of the races and Reaper ships ranging from 500 to 2,000 metres (1,600 to 6,600 ft) long.<sup>[44][45]</sup> Some changes were made to already-existing class types; for example, Engineers are now able to build turrets.

## Multiplayer

*Mass Effect 3* offers a multiplayer co-op mode called "Galaxy at War", the first such mode of the series.<sup>[46][47]</sup> In the mode, players are able to play alongside up to three other players online in unique missions that can impact the outcome of the single player campaign.<sup>[48]</sup> Each mission was designed specifically for multiplayer, and involves taking over enemy strongholds. By completing these missions, players can give themselves a better chance of attaining a perfect ending in the single player campaign; although, they are not necessary to do so. Over the course of one year, BioWare released five free DLC packs for the multiplayer mode that added several types of new content. The mode has been compared to *Gears of War*'s horde mode.<sup>[49]</sup>

Players have the ability to fight against 4 different opponents: the Reapers, Geth, Cerberus, and with the *Retaliation* DLC installed the Collectors. Battles take place over a choice of more than 15 maps, with 4 choices of difficulty, Bronze (Easy), Silver (Normal), Gold (Hard), and—with the *Earth* DLC installed—Platinum (Very Hard). Platinum maps will randomly spawn tank units from random races in addition to the key race being fought against; an example might be Reaper Ravagers fighting alongside Cerberus Troopers or a Geth Prime assisting Reaper Banshees; a Cerberus Atlas fighting with Scions. Each map lasts for 10 rounds, with players defending against waves of attack, each getting progressively harder. Certain waves will have the team performing certain goals, such as defusing doctrine devices, enabling/disabling remote weapon stations or communications outlets, hacking computers, killing key targets, escorting probes, or transporting critical hardware (such as hard drives, lethal chemicals or warheads).

No characters from the single-player campaign are featured in the multiplayer mode; instead, players create brand new characters for themselves and can play as members of non-human species, including asari, batarians, drell, krogans, quarians, salarians, turians, geth, vorchas, volus, and more.<sup>[50]</sup> Every race has unique powers, such as a "Krogan Charge" for krogans and different movement options out of cover between drell and humans.<sup>[51]</sup> All classes are playable.<sup>[49]</sup> The maximum level that created characters are able to reach is 20, and just like in the single player mode, leveling up includes skill branches.

Gameplay in the multiplayer mode only allows for players to carry two guns at a time in their inventory, and there is no menu to change weapons; instead, weapons are changed by holding down a button.<sup>[51]</sup> Only three powers per class are also available as opposed to those available during the single player game. Characters, equipment, mods, and weapons are acquired randomly with the purchase of graded kits. The kits are purchased with multiplayer in-game credits or real-life currency.

One year after the game's release, BioWare discontinued any further multiplayer challenges, while leaving the challenge system functional and servers up.<sup>[52]</sup>

## Synopsis

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### Setting and characters

*Mass Effect 3* is set within the Milky Way galaxy during the 22nd century where interstellar travel is possible through the use of mass transit devices called Mass Relays, a technology believed to have been built by an extinct alien race known as the Protheans.<sup>[53]</sup> A conglomerate body of governments based out of the Citadel, an ancient space station, controls a large percentage of the galaxy and is responsible for maintaining law and order among races of the galactic community.<sup>[54]</sup> Races that belong to the Citadel Council include humans, the blue-skinned asari, the lizard-like salarians, and the avian turians. Other alien races seen in the game include the reptilian krogan, the environmental

suited quarians, the four-eyed batarians, and a race of networked artificial intelligences called geth.<sup>[55]</sup> During the events of the original *Mass Effect*, the Reapers, a highly advanced machine race of synthetic-organic starships that are believed to eradicate all organic civilization every 50,000 years, attempted to launch a full-scale invasion of the Milky Way, but were delayed by the efforts of the Systems Alliance, humanity's representative body in the interstellar community. Meanwhile, a human supremacist organization called Cerberus believes that humans deserve a greater role in the galactic community and supports the principle that any methods of advancing humanity's ascension are entirely justified, including illegal experimentation and terrorist activities.<sup>[56]</sup>

The protagonist of the game is Commander Shepard (Mark Meer or Jennifer Hale), a graduate of the Systems Alliance special forces program who commands the *Normandy SR-2* starship. Shepard's squad members include human Alliance officer Ashley Williams (Kimberly Brooks) or Kaidan Alenko (Raphael Sbarge), human Alliance marine James Vega (Freddie Prinze Jr.), asari information broker Liara T'Soni (Ali Hillis), turian military adviser Garrus Vakarian (Brandon Keener), *Normandy SR-2* artificial intelligence EDI (Tricia Helfer), and quarian engineer Tali'Zorah (Ash Sroka). Other characters include the *Normandy's* pilot Jeff "Joker" Moreau (Seth Green), Systems Alliance admiral David Anderson (Keith David), Systems Alliance admiral Steven Hackett (Lance Henriksen), and Cerberus leader the Illusive Man (Martin Sheen).<sup>[57]</sup>

In the *Mass Effect 2* DLC *Arrival*, Commander Shepard travels into batarian space to rescue an Alliance deep cover agent, and learns that the Reaper invasion is imminent. To delay them, Shepard is forced to destroy a mass relay, obliterating an entire system and killing 300,000 batarian colonists in the process. Within the year 2186, Shepard is consequently relieved of duty and ordered back to Earth with the *Normandy* impounded.<sup>[58]</sup>

## Plot

Six months after the events of *Mass Effect 2*, the Reapers finally invade and quickly overwhelm Earth. Shepard is reinstated by Anderson, who stays behind to rally resistance, and escapes Vancouver with James and the Virmire survivor (Ashley/Kaidan). Shepard is ordered to Mars by Hackett, battling Cerberus forces and meeting Liara, who has discovered a Prothean superweapon which can destroy the Reapers. The Illusive Man intervenes, aiming to control the Reapers instead. His AI "Eva Coré" severely injures Ashley/Kaidan. As the Alliance builds the superweapon, dubbed "The Crucible", the Council refuses to assist humanity, so Hackett orders Shepard to forge alliances by aiding other species in their own battles against the Reapers.

Shepard reunites with Garrus (if he survived the suicide mission) and rescues turian Primarch Adrien Victus. Victus pledges turian support if the krogan help defend their homeworld, Palaven, but krogan leader Urdnot Wrex (or Wreav if Wrex was killed on Virmire) refuses until the genophage is cured. A cure is being developed by former squadmate Mordin Solus (or Padok Wiks if Mordin did not survive the suicide mission), along with a krogan female named "Eve". Ultimately, Shepard must either allow Mordin/Padok to undo a sabotage by the salarians and complete the cure or stop them and preserve the sabotage, earning the support of salarian Dalatrass Linron. A successful sabotage will deceive Wreav but Wrex will find out and call off krogan support, forcing Shepard to kill him.

After stopping a coup attempt from humanity's councillor Donnel Udina at the Citadel and optionally re-recruiting Ashley/Kaidan, Shepard travels to the Perseus Veil, where the quarians are aiming to reclaim their homeworld, Rannoch, from the geth. Accompanied by Tali'Zorah (or Admiral Xen if Tali died in the suicide mission), Shepard rescues Legion (or a Geth VI if Legion died or was not activated/sold to Cerberus by Shepard), and disables the Reapers' control over the geth. As the quarians close in on defeating the geth, Shepard must either allow the geth to upgrade and annihilate the quarian flotilla, stop the upgrade and let the quarians vanquish the geth, or negotiate a ceasefire and gain support from both sides (dependent on past decisions).

The asari councilor then informs Shepard of a Prothean artifact on their homeworld, Thessia, which may help Shepard identify the "Catalyst", an essential tool which can complete the Crucible. Shepard discovers a Prothean VI named "Vendetta", but Cerberus assassin Kai Leng arrives and steals it as Thessia falls to the Reapers. Deciding to take the

fight to the Illusive Man, Shepard follows Leng to the human colony, Horizon, where Cerberus has been researching how to control the Reapers. There, Shepard encounters Miranda Lawson (if she survived the suicide mission), who gives Shepard her tracking device. Shepard assaults Cerberus headquarters; although the Illusive Man has already escaped, Shepard successfully recovers Vendetta and kills Leng.

Shepard learns that the Catalyst is in fact the Citadel itself, which the Reapers have captured after successfully indoctrinating the Illusive Man. Under Hackett, Anderson and Shepard's leadership, the Alliance and its allies launch an all-out assault on the Reapers in a last-ditch effort to activate the Crucible and retake Earth and the Citadel. After a long battle in a ruined London, Shepard determinedly makes it to the Citadel beam after being greatly wounded by Harbinger, the most powerful of all the Reapers. He/she finds Anderson being held hostage by the Illusive Man; Shepard must kill the Illusive Man or convince him of his indoctrination, causing him to commit suicide. The conflict ends in Anderson's death, after which Shepard is transported to the pinnacle of the Citadel.

A childlike AI appears, proclaiming itself the Catalyst and the creator of the Reapers. It reveals that the Reapers harvest and preserve organics advanced by synthetics to allow more primitive species to evolve, with the Catalyst aiming to find a solution, but now conceding defeat to Shepard. Shepard must finally decide how to activate the Crucible: destroy the Reapers and all synthetic life, seize control of the Reapers, or synthesize organic and synthetic life together. The activation results in Shepard's death and the mass relay network being destroyed. However, if Shepard destroys the Reapers with a high enough Effective Military Strength (EMS), he/she will instead take a gasping breath from within a pile of rubble and survive.

In a post-credits scene, an individual known as the "Stargazer" tells Shepard's story to a young boy, implying that Shepard's legacy lives on far into the future.

## Extended Cut

The Extended Cut provides additional scenes and dialogue towards the end of the story. Shepard's squadmates are critically injured (incinerated if EMS is low) by Harbinger during the push to the Citadel beam, forcing Shepard to call in the Normandy to extract them. Shepard can now refuse to activate the Crucible, leading to a Reaper victory and a fourth ending where the next cycle defeats the Reapers instead via knowledge from one of Liara's beacons. If Shepard does activate the Crucible, his/her flashbacks while doing so have been adjusted: the first is Anderson, the second is someone who died during the events of the story, and the third is Shepard's love interest. The mass relays are now severely damaged instead of being destroyed by the Crucible's firing unless EMS is low.

The three original endings now include a varying narration by Hackett (Destroy), Shepard's Reaper AI (Control), or EDI (Synthesis), as the fates of the survivors is shown based on Shepard's choices. Shepard having low EMS and picking Destroy will result in the Crucible devastating the galaxy, implicitly killing the Normandy's crew and leaving a more pessimistic outlook for the future. If Shepard has sufficiently high EMS, the surviving Normandy members hold a memorial service for him/her. The squad member closest to Shepard will place Shepard's name on the memorial wall (Control), and also share a hug with EDI (Synthesis). However, they will instead refuse and smile hopefully if Shepard chooses Destroy.

## Development

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### Origins

From the start, BioWare envisioned the *Mass Effect* series as a trilogy, with the first two games being a preamble to the third.<sup>[59]</sup> For this reason, BioWare was able to begin production on *Mass Effect 3* before *Mass Effect 2* was even released.<sup>[60]</sup> The game was directed by Casey Hudson, who previously led the production of the first two *Mass Effect* games and *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*. To design the game, BioWare made sure to use fan feedback,

similar to what they did for *Mass Effect 2*.<sup>[61]</sup> In particular, the game's development team paid close attention to past mistakes in the series as well as the critical failings of other BioWare titles such as *Dragon Age II*.<sup>[62]</sup> The team was able to devote most of their time to gameplay and storytelling because, according to BioWare Edmonton General Manager Aaron Flynn, they didn't have to worry about technology as it was "pretty maxed out".<sup>[63]</sup> Initially, the game was predicted to be released at the end of 2011 or early 2012.<sup>[64]</sup>

The lead writer of *Mass Effect 3* is Mac Walters, who previously wrote on other games in the *Mass Effect* series as well as *Jade Empire*.<sup>[65]</sup> One of the goals set by the writing staff at the beginning of production was to treat the game like a movie and make sure that players playing it for the first time would "just be able to jump in".<sup>[66]</sup> Emphasis was put on making the story user friendly for players inexperienced with the franchise because BioWare felt they "didn't do a really good job of new player orientation" in *Mass Effect 2*.<sup>[67]</sup> To begin the writing process, Hudson and Walters sat down and created a story document no longer than three or four pages that contained all the major plot points.<sup>[66]</sup> Once the document was complete, Walters took the document to the writing staff and began filling out minor details including minor plot points and missions. Once these details were complete and the "backbone of the story" was established, each writer was put in charge of specific levels and missions. Work done by each writer was reviewed in-depth by the rest of the writing staff and others.<sup>[68]</sup>

According to former *Mass Effect* writer Drew Karpysyn, the overarching narrative and ending went through multiple redrafts. One sketched scenario was based upon dark energy accelerating the end of the universe—dark energy increases had been touched upon but never expanded or explained in *Mass Effect 2*. The Reapers, seeing the dark energy's effects, would have been trying to counter its effects. Seeing that biotic organics could manipulate dark energy, the Reapers would use the cycle to find a race whose biotic potential would counter the dark energy's detrimental effects. Another early idea was having Shepherd be a disguised alien being, but this was discarded as it was deemed too similar to the central plot twist of *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*. The writing team made use of a discarded story idea for *Mass Effect 2* for the game's "Synthesis" ending.<sup>[69]</sup>

## Reveal

On December 10, 2010, Electronic Arts posted the official synopsis for *Mass Effect 3* on their website, although the listing was later removed pending an official announcement at the 2010 Spike Video Game Awards.<sup>[70][71]</sup> The following day, the game was confirmed for a "Holiday 2011" release and accompanied by a teaser trailer.<sup>[72]</sup> On March 21, 2011, Tricia Helfer announced via Twitter that she would reprise her role from *Mass Effect 2* as EDI, and had already started voice-recording sessions.<sup>[73]</sup> Seth Green soon followed, announcing that he would reprise his role from *Mass Effect 2* and the first *Mass Effect* as Joker.<sup>[74]</sup>

The first detailed information regarding development of *Mass Effect 3* started being released in April 2011. On April 20, Belgian website 4gamers.be reported that BioWare were collaborating with *Battlefield* developer DICE in weapon development for the game.<sup>[75]</sup> The same day, Game Informer released the first-ever screenshots of *Mass Effect 3* to help promote their May 10 cover story.<sup>[76]</sup> On May 3, 2011, IGN announced that *Mass Effect 3* would be presented and demoed by Electronic Arts at the 2011 Electronic Entertainment Expo.<sup>[77]</sup> The next day, BioWare announced that the game's release date had been pushed back to early 2012,<sup>[78]</sup> in part so it could be tweaked to appeal to as wide a market as possible.<sup>[79]</sup> On June 1, EA Games' online store uploaded artwork by mistake which revealed the game will have Kinect support.<sup>[80]</sup> The artwork was later removed. At the 2011 E3 Convention, BioWare finally confirmed Kinect support in a gameplay video.<sup>[81]</sup> The game's collector's edition,<sup>[82]</sup> cover art, a new teaser trailer and official release date of March 6, 2012 were also revealed. For the first time, fans were shown actual gameplay videos, including a 15 minute demo supervised by Casey Hudson.<sup>[83]</sup> At Comic-Con 2011, fans were given an opportunity to play a demo version of the game.<sup>[84]</sup> Hudson and lead writer Mac Walters were both in attendance, with Hudson sitting on the Legendary Pictures panel to talk about the upcoming *Mass Effect* film and Walters sitting on the Dark Horse Comics panel. At Gamescon 2011, a new trailer was released demonstrating 50 seconds of combat gameplay.<sup>[85]</sup> The game was also demoed at PAX Prime 2011.<sup>[86]</sup>

## Internal leaks and multiplayer

On October 3, a leaked South African advertisement hinted at multiplayer capabilities for *Mass Effect 3*.<sup>[87]</sup> On October 10, multiple BioWare employees took to Twitter to announce that the game would have a multiplayer component.<sup>[88]</sup> The announcement confirmed longstanding multiplayer rumors, stemming from a BioWare job listing in 2010 for someone to take *Mass Effect*'s "existing single player user experiences and make them multiplayer safe".<sup>[89]</sup> On October 12, an official trailer for the multiplayer mode was released through BioWare Pulse.<sup>[50]</sup> Soon after, it was reported that a demo for both multiplayer and single-player modes would be released in January 2012.<sup>[90]</sup>

On November 4, a private beta of *Mass Effect 3* became available on Xbox Live.<sup>[91]</sup> The beta was only available to players who signed up to beta test a new version of the Xbox 360 Dashboard. In a response from Jesse Houston, it was revealed that the leak was the result of "human error" at Microsoft. Houston stressed that the leaked code was in a rough, unfinished state not intended for public release. Despite BioWare's quick response, some fan videos still made their way to YouTube. From the beta, some information was extracted from game files that represented rough notes from early story drafts.<sup>[92]</sup> In an interview conducted shortly after the leaked script was removed, BioWare co-founders Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk revealed that feedback from fans who read it might be used to tweak the story before the game was released.<sup>[93]</sup>

## Pre-release

On September 13, Casey Hudson posted to Twitter that *Mass Effect 3* was seeing signs of its final stage of production.<sup>[94]</sup> A few days later, lead writer Mac Walters revealed that writing for the game was almost finished.<sup>[95]</sup> Music started going into the game around the same time.<sup>[96]</sup> On October 27, the development team transitioned into an "editing" stage where story elements were evaluated and key lines or scenes were re-written.<sup>[97]</sup> Character lighting was being polished as of November 7 and voice overs were completely recorded by December 7.<sup>[98][99]</sup> On December 10, the game was presented at the 2011 Spike Video Game Awards with a new teaser trailer.<sup>[100]</sup> On January 9, 2012, Sam Hulick turned in his last audio mixes for the game.<sup>[101]</sup> On February 22, 2012, SCEA offered bonuses to those that pre-order via the PlayStation Network. These incentives include A M55 Argus weapon and a *Mass Effect 3* PS3 theme.<sup>[102]</sup> On March 2, the game became available for preload on Origin in the case of digital purchases.

## Audio

*Mass Effect 3*'s music is composed by Golden Globe-nominated composer Clint Mansell, together with Christopher Lennertz, Cris Velasco, BAFTA-nominated composer Sam Hulick and Sasha Dikicyan.<sup>[103][104]</sup> Mansell first stated he would be scoring the game during an interview with The Quietus on February 9, 2011.<sup>[105]</sup> Electronic Arts officially announced his involvement shortly thereafter with a Facebook post.<sup>[106]</sup> *Mass Effect* and *Mass Effect 2* composer Jack Wall had no involvement with the production of *Mass Effect 3* due to undetailed and "complicated" reasons.<sup>[107]</sup>

Commander Shepard is again voiced by Mark Meer (male) and Jennifer Hale (female).<sup>[108]</sup> Many other members of the cast return, including: Kimberly Brooks (Ashley Williams), Brandon Keener (Garrus Vakarian), Ali Hillis (Liara T'Soni), Liz Sroka (Tali'Zorah), Raphael Sbarge (Kaidan Alenko), Steve Barr (Urdnott Wrex), Yvonne Strahovski (Miranda Lawson), Tricia Helfer (EDI), Seth Green (Jeff "Joker" Moreau), Martin Sheen (The Illusive Man), Lance Henriksen (Admiral Hackett) and Keith David (Admiral David Anderson). New voice actors include Jessica Chobot (Diana Allers), Freddy Prinze Jr. (James Vega), Susan Eisenberg (Councilor Irissa) and Buzz Aldrin (The Stargazer).<sup>[108][109]</sup>

*Mass Effect 3*'s weapon audio is redesigned and refined. BioWare's audio team was in discussion with other EA studios, including DICE, to improve their combat soundscape.<sup>[110]</sup> The game has 40,000 lines of recorded dialog, twice as much as the first game and almost twice as much as the second game.<sup>[111]</sup> The game has 12,500 sound and music files.<sup>[112]</sup>



# Marketing

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To promote *Mass Effect 3*, BioWare relied heavily on viral marketing. Using an internal channel called BioWare Pulse, weekly videos were posted on the company's official website and YouTube offering fans a preview of upcoming content.<sup>[113][114]</sup> To keep in touch with fans during development, social networking websites such as Twitter were utilized by members of the game's production team including Casey Hudson and Mac Walters.<sup>[115]</sup> On December 12, 2011, staff writer Patrick Weekes posted a blog as Commander Shepard writing from the Normandy and elaborating on some minor plot points.<sup>[116]</sup> Official badges, 2D and 3D posters, stickers and temporary tattoos for the game will be produced by GB Eye and stocked by retailers such as Chips and HMV.<sup>[117]</sup> A demo for the game was released on February 14, 2012.<sup>[118]</sup> Early access to the demo was granted to consumers who purchased *Battlefield 3* and activated their online pass.<sup>[119]</sup>

*Mass Effect 3* was released in multiple editions. Alongside the regular edition, there was also a collector's edition and a digital deluxe edition, each of which included bonus content and unlockable items; most notably, four exclusive weapons found in the N7 Arsenal Pack.<sup>[82]</sup> The digital deluxe edition is exclusively available through Origin, EA's rebranded PC game store.<sup>[120]</sup> All pre-orders of the game were accompanied with the M55 Argus Assault Rifle bonus weapon, with retailer-specific bonuses available as well.<sup>[121]</sup> Anyone who pre-orders the game from GameStop will receive N7 warfare gear and anyone who pre-orders the game from Origin will receive an AT12 Raider Shotgun. As a part of a crossover promotion, players can also unlock two bonus items — the Reckoner Knight Armor and Chakram Launcher — by playing through the demo for *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*.<sup>[122]</sup> To alleviate sales lost to the second-hand market and rentals, only unused copies of *Mass Effect 3* will come with an online pass allowing players full access to the online multiplayer mode.<sup>[123][124]</sup> Once the pass is activated, it cannot be used again; therefore, players who buy the game used are required to pay an additional fee in order to use multiplayer.

Unlike the first two games in the series, BioWare specifically included the female version of Commander Shepard in marketing *Mass Effect 3*.<sup>[125]</sup> Often referred to colloquially as "FemShep", she was featured in her own dedicated trailer for the game, as well as a revised version of the "Take Back Earth" trailer. She also appeared on the cover of the *Mass Effect 3 N7 Collector's Edition*.<sup>[126]</sup> In addition, the standard version of the game featured a reversible slipcase insert, allowing the purchaser to display either the male or female version of Shepard on the front and back cover artwork.<sup>[127]</sup> To help decide the official female Shepard model, BioWare let fans choose between five prototypes on Facebook.<sup>[128]</sup> Eventually, the fifth prototype won and a new fan vote was held to decide its hair color, which ended up being red.<sup>[129][130][131]</sup>

In February 2012, EA sent early copies of *Mass Effect 3* into space via weather balloons. The games were equipped with a GPS tracking device, allowing fans to track their progress. When the balloons landed, anyone who found one was able to snag a copy of *Mass Effect 3* a week or more ahead of its release.<sup>[132]</sup>

## Release and downloadable content

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Before *Mass Effect 3*'s release date was delayed to 2012, numerous gaming websites called the game one of the most anticipated games of 2011,<sup>[133][134]</sup> with IGN ranking it number one in their "Top 10 Xbox 360 Games of 2011" column.<sup>[135]</sup> Following the 2011 E3 Convention, IGN nominated the game for Best Role-Playing Game and Most Anticipated Game,<sup>[136]</sup> and EEDAR called it the most promising retail title of 2011.<sup>[137]</sup> At the 2011 Spike Video Game Awards, the game was voted the most anticipated of 2012 by fans.<sup>[138]</sup> In an interview with Computer and Videogames, BioWare marketing director David Silverman went so far as to call *Mass Effect 3* the "best game we've ever made".<sup>[139]</sup>

The game was released for Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 on March 6, 2012, and for Wii U on November 18, 2012. Customers purchasing PC editions of the game (retail or digital) are required to install Electronic Arts' content delivery and digital rights management system, Origin. The Origin client (and an Origin account) is

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required to install, activate and run *Mass Effect 3* on a PC for single and multi-player portions of the game.<sup>[140]</sup> This is the only title in the series unavailable for the Steam platform.

In November 2016, *Mass Effect 3* was added to the list of backward compatible Xbox 360 games on Xbox One.

*Mass Effect 3* also supports a variety of downloadable content packs that were released from March 2012 to April 2013. The Wii U version – *Mass Effect 3: Special Edition* – features all the free DLC in-game that were released prior to *Special Edition*'s release. However, EA announced that there are no plans to release any of the paid DLC packs for the Wii U version, including "Omega", "Leviathan", and the various weapon packs. When asked on Twitter if they would release any future DLC for the Wii U version, their response was, "Never say never. :)"<sup>[141][142]</sup>

# Reception

## Critical response

*Mass Effect 3* was met with critical acclaim by video game critics. Andrew Reiner of *Game Informer* awarded it 10 out of 10 and asserted that "BioWare has delivered one of the most intricately crafted stories in the history of the medium".<sup>[155]</sup> Thierry Nguyen of *1UP.com* rated the game "A" and concluded, "While Mass Effect 3 stumbles at times, the fact that it's the ultimate culmination of my own Shepard's story makes it one of the signature (and somewhat-literal) role-playing-games of this year."<sup>[151]</sup> *Edge* rated the game 8/10 saying "It's off-putting to new players, too busy tying up loose ends to dangle any threads of its own, and fails to stand up as its own game in the same manner as its predecessors. But it's also a spectacular, powerfully imagined and dramatically involving final act to one of gaming's richest sci-fi sagas."<sup>[152]</sup> Tom Francis of *PC Gamer U.S.* gave the game a score of 93/100 and ended with saying "...the end of the series is a mixed bag. Satisfying in some ways, nonsensical in others, and ultimately too simple. But the sheer scale of the adventure it's ending – and the music, which is gorgeous throughout – gives it an emotional impact that goes beyond its plot payload."<sup>[160]</sup> *Mass Effect 3* was nominated for five awards in the 2012 *Spike Video Game Awards*, including Game of the Year, and it won one, Best RPG.<sup>[161]</sup> *Game Informer* awarded it their game of the year award.<sup>[162]</sup>

## Controversy

Reception	
Aggregate scores	
Aggregator	Score
GameRankings	(X360) 92.17% <sup>[143]</sup>
	(PS3) 91.65% <sup>[144]</sup>
	(PC) 87.75% <sup>[145]</sup>
	(WIIU) 86.22% <sup>[146]</sup>
Metacritic	(X360) 93/100 <sup>[147]</sup>
	(PS3) 93/100 <sup>[148]</sup>
	(PC) 89/100 <sup>[149]</sup>
	(WIIU) 85/100 <sup>[150]</sup>
Review scores	
Publication	Score
<i>1UP.com</i>	A <sup>[151]</sup>
<i>Edge</i>	8/10 <sup>[152]</sup>
<i>Eurogamer</i>	10/10 <sup>[153]</sup>
<i>G4</i>	5/5 <sup>[154]</sup>
<i>Game Informer</i>	10/10 <sup>[155]</sup>
<i>GameSpot</i>	9.0/10 <sup>[156]</sup>
<i>GameTrailers</i>	9.5/10 <sup>[157]</sup>
<i>IGN</i>	9.5/10 <sup>[158]</sup>
<i>OXM (UK)</i>	10/10 <sup>[159]</sup>
<i>PC Gamer (US)</i>	93/100 <sup>[160]</sup>

The game's ending was poorly received by many fans, and the negative PC fan reviews in Metacritic exceed the mixed and positive reviews. Criticisms included that the single palette swap ending rendered character choices inconsequential; a general lack of closure; lore contradictions and plot holes; character and narrative inconsistencies; the absence of a final boss battle; and inconsistencies between statements by BioWare staff during the game's development and the form the endings ultimately took.<sup>[163][164][165][166][167]</sup>

Displeased fans organized an internet campaign called "Retake Mass Effect" to demand a better ending to the game, part of which includes a charity drive for the organization Child's Play.<sup>[168][169][170]</sup> The drive officially raised \$80,000 in less than two weeks.<sup>[171][172]</sup> One fan went so far as taking his complaint to the Federal Trade Commission, the agency created to protect consumers. His argument was that BioWare did not deliver on the promise of its game, saying, "after reading through the list of promises about the ending of the game they made in their advertising campaign and PR interviews, it was clear that the product we got did not live up to any of those claims."<sup>[173]</sup> However, with the release of the extended cut, he is now happy with the end product.<sup>[174]</sup>

One of the writers of the *Mass Effect* series, Patrick Weekes, posted a message on gaming website Penny Arcade, citing among other criticisms that the ending section lacked the same peer review process used with the rest of the game.<sup>[175]</sup>

The US Better Business Bureau also responded to the controversy, supporting claims by fans that BioWare falsely advertised the player's "complete" control over the game's final outcome.<sup>[176][177]</sup> The UK's Advertising Standards Authority disagreed, ruling that EA and BioWare were not guilty of false advertisement since the endings were "thematically quite different", and the choices and readiness rating reflected in the ending content were significant enough to avoid actionable misleading of consumers under existing law.<sup>[178]</sup>

BioWare's co-founder and CEO Ray Muzyka acknowledged feedback over the endings stating that the company planned to address them, with an announcement to be made in April 2012.<sup>[179][180]</sup> On April 5, 2012, BioWare announced they would offer a free download to be released during the summer, which would expand the ending with a cinematic epilogue but not replace it.<sup>[181]</sup> The Extended Cut was released on June 26, 2012 for Xbox 360 and PC worldwide, and PlayStation 3 in North America and later released on July 4, 2012 for PS3 in Europe.<sup>[182]</sup>

## Sales

During March 2012, *Mass Effect 3* sold over 3.5 million copies.<sup>[183][184]</sup> According to EA's Q4 results, *Mass Effect 3* has grossed over \$200 million.<sup>[185]</sup> The game had sold over 6 million copies by January 2017.<sup>[186]</sup>

## Sequel

A sequel, *Mass Effect: Andromeda*, was announced and released in the first quarter of 2017. In regards to bridging the game with the original trilogy, BioWare's Mike Gamble stated that "There is no canon ending to ME3. Player choice is something we take very seriously."<sup>[187]</sup>

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